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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND
COORDINATION
Thirty-second session
11-22 May 1992
Agenda item 9

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FIRST PART OF ITS THIRTY-SECOND SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Sally E. MOSS (Bahamas)

Review of the programme of work of the Committee and suggestions on the timing and duration of its sessions

1. At its 17th, 18th and 19th meetings, on 20 and 21 May, the Committee considered the review of the programme of work of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and suggestions on the timing and duration of its sessions.

Discussion

2. The Chairman of the Committee introduced the item. He referred to Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/67, in which the Committee was requested to review its programme of work, taking into account the review of the subsidiary machinery in the economic, social and related fields; to the increased workload of the Committee resulting from the new budgetary process introduced by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213; to General Assembly resolution 46/189 on programme planning, which also requested the Committee to review its programme of work; to resolution 45/264 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields and particularly to the "coordination segment" of the

annual session of the Economic and Social Council; and to the report of the Committee at its thirty-first session on the question of documentation, which the Committee had noted remained a cause for concern. The Chairman also indicated that two themes - eradication of poverty in developing countries and the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic - had been selected for the 1992 coordination segment of the Council. As had been pointed out by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Development, the CPC was not in a position in the current year to make an input into the coordination segment of the Council.

3. The Chairman of the Committee further stated that the request of the Council was clearly focused on the question of the timing and duration of the sessions of the Committee. A debate on the mandate or composition of the Committee was not requested. It should also be borne in mind that the General Assembly was to review at its forty-eighth session the results of the restructuring of the Economic and Social Council.

4. In order to assist the Committee in its consideration of the item, the Chairman listed a number of concrete issues that he requested the Committee to address. These issues were the following:

(a) Duration of the sessions of the Committee;

(b) Timing of the meetings of the Committee and of the Joint CPC/ACC meetings;

(c) Question of the timeliness and availability of documentation, which should be seen as a key to the efficient functioning of the Committee;

(d) Support provided by the Secretariat to the Committee, for instance in terms of the planning of documentation;

(e) Timing of the organizational session of the Committee;

(f) Current format of the report of the Committee;

(g) Inter-sessional contacts between the Secretariat and the Committee;

(h) Relationship of the CPC with other committees or units, such as the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU);

(i) Questions regarding the Committee's report to the Council, its format and substance.

5. The Chairman of the Committee stressed that the inter-sessional contacts he had suggested were related purely to the question of the timeliness of the documentation. Such contacts would provide an incentive to the Secretariat for submitting documents on time. It was suggested that the bureau of the Committee, and/or representatives of regional groups might represent the Committee in its contacts with the Secretariat between sessions.

6. The relationship between the agenda and the duration of the session was emphasized. It was pointed out that some items, for instance, those on evaluation and/or coordination, or the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, could be considered every other year. That proposal was supported by a number of delegations. A number of delegations questioned the approach.

7. A number of delegations expressed the view that the length of the Committee's session could be reduced through efficient management of its work programme. Other delegations noted that in fact two or three more days would be useful. The search for consensus required lengthy negotiations. It was also pointed out that the current system of sitting for six-weeks in off-budget years and four weeks in budget years was not sacrosanct. A pragmatic approach would be desirable for a variable duration in budget years, medium-term plan adoption years, and medium-term plan revision years.

8. A number of delegations stressed that the timing of the joint CPC/ACC meetings was inconvenient in many respects. It was noted that in the past such meetings occurred in July, prior to the summer session of the Economic and Social Council. It was also noted that a joint meeting immediately before or after the CPC session would have a number of advantages. It was further noted that a joint meeting at the beginning of the calendar year would facilitate timely reporting to the Council. A number of delegations held that the joint meetings should be discontinued. Their usefulness was questionable, and they were in any case de facto replaced by the "coordination segment" of the Council.

9. With regard to the timing of the CPC meeting, a number of delegations noted that delaying the thirty-second session to the second week of May had facilitated the provision of most documents at least one or two weeks before the beginning of the session, which is still too late. It was emphasized that the reporting of CPC to the Economic and Social Council was the key for determining the best scheduling of the CPC session. Should the CPC report only to the General Assembly, it was clear that the end of August/beginning of September would be the most appropriate time for the Committee's meeting. A number of delegations stated that the Committee could not in any case meet in April because of the problem of availability of documentation. Other delegations pointed out that the availability of conference-servicing facilities was also an important factor in determining the scheduling of the Committee's meetings.

10. Questions were raised as to the rationale for the current timing of the organizational session of the Committee. One delegation noted that representatives coming from capitals were not in a position to attend such a session when it was organized as long as a month before the substantive session itself. A number of delegations noted that an organizational session taking place a few weeks ahead would be valuable in determining the starting date of the substantive session in relation to the status of documentation and that it was not necessary to have the participation of experts from capitals at that meeting.

11. The Committee remained seriously concerned about the late issuance of documentation which continues to have a negative effect on the work of the Committee.

12. The Secretariat stated that the difficulties in producing documentation six weeks before an intergovernmental meeting were due to several factors, including the necessity of holding consultations between several units; the trade-off, sometimes unavoidable, between timeliness and quality, and the availability of timely information. A document completed by a substantive unit eight or nine weeks before a meeting would sometimes be based on obsolete information. The Secretariat also stated that it was possible, in a number of cases, to produce short documents focused on main aspects of the analysis of a given issue and on conclusions and recommendations, while making available to the Committee supporting information through conference room papers. Further, the Secretariat noted that efforts should continue to be made for the timely production of documents in all official languages.

13. The question of secretariat support to the Committee was mentioned by a number of delegations. A number were of the view that a permanent secretariat, similar to the secretariat servicing the ACABQ, would greatly enhance the quality and timeliness of the services provided to the Committee. Others were not convinced of the usefulness of such a permanent support. The Secretariat recalled the distinction between the technical servicing and the substantive servicing of the Committee. The Secretary of the Committee, while ensuring the technical servicing, was also responsible for the servicing of other intergovernmental committees. Apart from documents on coordination, now produced by the Department for Economic and Social Development, all other documents were produced by the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance.

14. Concerning the relationships between the Committee and the ACABQ, it was noted that a comparison between the working methods of the two Committees was not very meaningful. The latter had an open-ended agenda, an open calendar of meetings and a full time secretariat. Each Committee had its own terms of reference. It was also noted that cooperation of the two Committees, within their own sphere of competence, was highly desirable.

15. Apart from the question of the link between reporting to the Council and the timing of the CPC session, the issue of the relevance of the role of CPC vis-à-vis the Council was addressed by a number of delegations. It was noted that the consideration by the Council of the CPC report was largely perfunctory. Even the parts of the proposed programme budget and of the medium-term plan, which were within the purview of the Council, were not the subject of a meaningful consideration. It was also noted that the recent changes in the functioning of the Council could improve this situation. Resolution 45/264 had not yet been fully implemented.

16. A number of delegations pointed out that 1992 was an exceptional year in the sense that a number of events were contributing to an increase in the work of CPC and were determining the timing of submission of documents. Such

events were notably the eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD VIII), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the restructuring of the Secretariat. It was also noted that this was a period of transition for the United Nations as a whole and that the Committee would have to respond flexibly, and in keeping with its mandate, to these developments.

Conclusions and recommendations

17. The Committee recognized that the actual length of its session was directly related to its increased workload as well as to the quality and timeliness of the documentation. With regard to the duration of the sessions, the Committee expressed the view that it should continue to work within the current range of time allotted to its session.

18. The Committee concluded that the timing of its sessions should continue to be determined by its dual reporting to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. In principle, the Committee would meet between April and June with a resumed session in an off-budget year. The Committee recommended that in budget years the possibility of holding its session in August/September be explored.

19. The Committee recommended that a review of its role with regard to the preparation and follow-up of the coordination segment be undertaken by the Council; the Council might also wish to assess the role of the Joint CPC/ACC meetings in the same process. The Committee recalled paragraphs 458 and 459 of the report of its thirty-first session (A/46/16) and recommended that measures to improve the usefulness of the Joint Meetings of CPC/ACC should be assessed in relation to the effectiveness of the coordination segment of the Council. The desirability of holding the Joint Meetings in the spring should be considered. Any such meetings should be held as closely as possible to CPC sessions.

20. With regard to the organizational session, the Committee concluded that it should take place approximately four to five weeks before the opening of the annual session. This would allow the Committee to assess the status of documentation for the session and take remedial measures as required.

21. The Committee stressed that the timely submission of documents of good quality was the key to the proper fulfilment of its mandate. The Committee also stressed that most documents should be more concise and more directly conducive to the adoption of conclusions and recommendations by the Committee. The Committee further stressed that documents should be available in all official languages sufficiently in advance to be considered by all national authorities concerned in a useful manner. The Committee was of the view that a time schedule for the issuance of documents should be attached as part of the report to the provisional agenda for the following annual session. The usefulness of inter-sessional contacts between the Bureau and the Secretariat with regard to the production and availability of documents was recognized.

22. The Committee concluded that the current format of its report, which comprised a concise account of the discussion on each item and of conclusions and recommendations, should be maintained.